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# FLARR Pages #8: Spanish Teachers: Eliminate the Grammatical Paradigm to Facilitate Student Learning

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File under:

- Functional Grammar
- Paradigm fallacies
- Psycho-generative language teaching
- Drill sequence alternative

"Spanish Teachers: Eliminate the Grammatical Paradigm to Facilitate Student Learning"

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Since all textbooks present each new verb in this manner-and we, too, have learned with this approach -use of paradigm is assumed to be the best and possibly the only way to teach verbs.

The truth is that 1) the paradigm impedes the critical process of habit formation, 2) confronts the student with the false idea that one must learn six forms of each verb, and 3) causes unnecessary confusion and stress in the learning process.

**Does the student need to learn six verb forms at one time?**

What I am sharing here is only one element of the Psycho-generative Teaching Method created Dr. Samuel Nordarse (ret.) that I have helped to develop -but this approach can be of value to teachers whatever materials they may be developing.

First, students should be taught in a

series of simple dialogs based on functional activities: "¿Come Ud? -Sí, yo como (hablo, canto, etc.)"

These questions should then be repeated with negative answers. The next six simple steps are: 1 & 2, adding a person: ¿Habla Ud. con su padre? with positive and negative answers. 3 & 4, replace the person with the time sequences: ¿Baila Ud. por la mañana? And 5 & 6, replace the time with place: ¿Estudia Ud. en casa?

Once these essential elements are established, they can then be developed further with the question words "¿Con quién?", "¿Dónde?", y "¿Cuándo?"

Teaching the "tú" form is then simply a matter of adding an "s" to the Ud. form. A habit that requires no analysis or knowledge of the other grammatical forms. This we can do in less than a minute. And this should be practiced with no reference to "Uds.," "vosotros," or "nosotros."

On the third or fourth day of class I present the "nosotros" form to the class-the easiest form of all to learn. I present on the blackboard a series of verbs using the major form: "comer, bailar, escribir, volver, etc." I tell them that all they need to do is drop the

“r” and add “mos.” It’s that simple!

And there are only two verbs in the entire Spanish language that violate that principle: “ser” and “ir.” And if “ir” is presented in the simple dialog fashion shown above-“¿Va Ud. a la fiesta? -Sí, yo voy a la fiesta” -then students will automatically give you the forms of “tú,” “Uds.,” and “nosotros,” since they all derive from the “Ud” form.

The “vosotros” form requires only that students know the difference between “ar,” “er,” and “ir” words. As with the “nosotros” form, you simply drop the “r” and in this case add “is” to “ar” and “er” words and “s” to “ir” words, adding an accent mark to the “á,” “é,” and “í” respectively.

So the habit that they have learned is that if they know the main form of the verb, “nosotros” and “vosotros” are automatic. If the verb has an internal change in some of the forms (e to ie, o to ue, or e to i) that is irrelevant to these forms -so, they should be taught separately.

I also do not speak of “irregular” verbs since that concept is false, except when applied to “ser.” There are three categories of “special” verbs: 1) Those in which the “yo” form does not end in “o:” “estoy, soy, doy, voy, and sé.” And if these have been presented with their “Ud.” counterparts in dialogs, (“está, es, da, va y sabe”) all except “ser” will derive their remaining forms automatically from the “Ud.” form.

So I do not waste my time and that of

the class teaching them what they already know: they tell me what the forms are. And we do practice writing them out from time to time as a way of reinforcing their confidence in their knowledge.

2) The second set of special words are those that end in “go:” “tengo, vengo, salgo, traigo, etc.”

3) The third set are those that have an internal change in some of the forms. My students soon learn to understand the shorthand of “(ue) volver,” “(ie) pensar,” and “(i) pedir.” Since this change is consistent and occurs in a number of verbs, it cannot rationally be called irregular.

**There are no irregular verbs in the Spanish present (except “ser”), -just three categories of “special” verbs.**

You will notice that in this article I have been using “functional” rather than “traditional” grammar. That is deliberate and also enhances and reinforces student learning and habit formation.

**“Functional” grammar enhances and reinforces student learning and habit formation.**